



STATE OF RHODE ISLAND AND PROVIDENCE PLANTATIONS
HISTORICAL PRESERVATION & HERITAGE COMMISSION

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**PULLED UP BY ITS OWN BOOTSTRAPS,
PAWTUCKET'S HOPE WEBBING COMPANY LISTED ON NATIONAL REGISTER**

A Pawtucket textile mill built between 1889 and 1913 has received federal recognition for its contributions to the history of architecture and industry. Frederick C. Williamson, Chairman of the Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission, announced that the National Park Service has added the Hope Webbing Company to the National Register of Historic Places. The National Register is the Federal Government's official list of properties throughout the United States whose historical and architectural significance makes them worthy of preservation. Built to house a manufacturer of webbed fabrics, the Hope Webbing Company is a significant example of Pawtucket's industrial and architectural history.

The Hope Webbing Company at 999-1005 Main Street occupies a seven-acre parcel crossed by the Moashassuck River. The property includes three major brick buildings that share a common vocabulary of construction materials and architectural features established in the initial design of the earliest buildings in 1889 and continued through the last phase of construction around 1913. The roofs are flat and either end flush with the walls or have overhanging wood cornices. The red brick walls display decorative brickwork at window and door openings. The buildings' fire-resistive or "slow-burning" construction features heavy post-and-beam framing and multiple-layer wood plank floors with limited structural steel framing and some concrete slab floors. Fenestration consists of

tall rectangular single or paired segmental arch window openings.

The massive Main Mill (built between 1889 and 1914) is composed of several attached buildings: a multistory Finishing Building headhouse and four Weave Sheds that extend west like teeth on a comb. The Main Mill housed administrative offices, finishing operations, and shipping. Built in two phases in 1903 and 1914, the Preparing Building is a five-story, loft-type structure that served as the warehouse and processing area for Hope Webbing's incoming materials, such as yarns, threads, and finishing materials. The Boiler House is a two-story building erected in 1889 to provide steam for heat and mechanical power until 1908, when it was converted for use as a workshop.

Charles Sisson and Oscar Steere founded the Hope Webbing Company in 1883 in a ten-loom shop. Their chief product was the webbing for boot pull-straps. The saying "Pull yourself up by your bootstraps" comes from the strap at the back of the boot that provides leverage to pull the boot on to your foot. By pulling on your own bootstrap, you can lift yourself up—in business, in education—without anyone else's help. The small firm quickly pulled itself up by its bootstraps and incorporated as the Hope Webbing Company in 1889. With 15 workers tending 60 looms, the company purchased land off Main Street in Pawtucket and signed a contract for a new mill building in 1889. In early 1890, 108 looms were moved into the new 17,000-square foot shop.

Though the Hope Webbing plant appears to have been designed and built all at once, it was built in at least eight major phases spurred by market demand and product development. By 1895, the plant employed 460 hands making 150 miles of products a day, including cotton, jute, worsted wool, and silk narrow woven fabrics such as boot and shoe straps, carpet and horse blanket binds, hat bands, non-elastic webs, hose supports, and electrical machinery insulation. Among Hope Webbing's most popular products at the time were cotton electric tape and related electric coil winding tapes—extremely thin fabric tapes for insulating electric motor wire coil windings.

Additions in 1906 incorporated indoor space for employee recreation including a club room, recreation and assembly areas, and a four-lane bowling alley which survives in good condition.

Employers like Hope Webbing believed that recreational facilities would dissuade unhealthy leisure pursuits, built team spirit, and increase company loyalty. The last major phase of construction concluded in 1913, and the company's employment peaked at 1300 during World War I.

By 1923, Hope Webbing was the world's largest manufacturer of narrow woven fabric with sales offices in Chicago and New York. In 1930, 1200 looms and 800 braiding machines produced banding, belting, binding, braids, cords, labels, name webs, life preservers, mattresses, pajamas, suspenders, trunks, underwear, and materials for industry. The plant changed hands several times starting in 1956. Hope Webbing, now known as Hope Global, moved to Cumberland in 1995.

The National Register nomination for the Hope Webbing was prepared by Matthew Kierstead of PAL. According to Edward F. Sanderson, executive director of the RIHPHC, "The Hope Webbing Mill is an important part of Pawtucket's industrial heritage. For a century following Samuel Slater's initial success in 1793, Pawtucket's mills were leading industrial producers, employed many of the city residents, and shaped the appearance of the city. Today, Hope Webbing is beginning a \$32 million rehabilitation to create new apartments and bring renewed vitality to its neighborhood, thanks to historic preservation tax credits administered by the RIHPHC."

In addition to honoring a property for its contribution to local, state, or national history, listing on the National Register provides additional benefits. It results in special consideration during the planning of Federal or federally assisted projects and makes properties eligible for Federal and Rhode Island tax benefits for historic rehabilitation projects. Owners of private property listed on the National Register are free to maintain, manage, or dispose of their property as they choose. As the state office for historic preservation, the Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission is responsible for reviewing and submitting Rhode Island nominations to the National Register.

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